

**TESTIMONY OF CINDY DUBUQUE**  
**PROPOSED BILL 1138: AN ACT STRENGTHENING SCHOOL BULLYING LAWS**  
**MARCH 11, 2011**

Honorable committee members, I appreciate the opportunity to comment on Raised Bill No. 1138, An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws. I commend the legislature and strongly support training for school personnel and the creation of a Safe School Awareness Day.

I would like to tell you about a girl I know. This girl had many challenges as a child. She had difficulty hearing and was labeled by some as mentally retarded. When she started school, classmates would pick on her, steal notes out of her lunch box, and ignore her on the playground. As she progressed in school and was no longer deemed retarded because her hearing issues were addressed, other children continued to taunt her, isolate her and make her feel unwanted. Her only friend in elementary school was her teacher. In middle school, a group of students would follow her down the hallway singing the song "walk like a man, talk like a man". In addition, they would whisper words to her, calling her manly and dyke. Since she did not know what dyke meant, but assumed it was something terrible, she felt confused, lonely and ashamed. In High School, some of this girl's teachers were openly homophobic and would promote anti-gay rhetoric in the classroom. At this point in time, this girl's self esteem was very low. While she did not skip school or get poor grades, she felt withdrawn, depressed and began to have suicidal thoughts. That girl was me.

As an adult, I made the decision that I would do everything in my power to help students feel valued and protected. As an educator, I have witnessed teachers stop racist or sexist comments in the classroom, while they allowed anti-gay comments such "faggot" and "that's so gay" to be used freely. As an educator, I have heard teachers and administrators admit that they are afraid to stop the use of anti-gay language for fear of being accused of promoting a "gay agenda" in school. As an educator, I have stopped students from using the words "faggot" and "dyke", but then have become a target, subject to rumors and taunts. In one school, a student whispered "dyke" under his breath as I walked by.

Training teachers on how to address bullying is essential to creating a safe learning environment. In addition, schools must create a climate of tolerance and respect which fosters academic achievement for all students. A Safe School Awareness Day will help. However, we can do more to protect students. Adding enumerated categories that include race, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity will provide teachers and administrators with the tools they need to address hateful and bias language. Enumeration shields educators from becoming targets and helps them to feel more comfortable with enforcing policies protecting the most vulnerable students. Enumeration also lets the most vulnerable students know that they are valued and protected.

I would like to say to any students who are being bullied that I know what it feels like to be isolated. I know how much it hurts to feel alone. You are not alone. There are so many people that you don't know who care about you and want to help you. It gets better, and we are making it better for you.